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Headways

"Mr. Farrell, even though you have closed your eyes to the situation in your own state, you know that Wisconsin affords a hideous proof of the fact that compromise, fear, selfishness, and stand-patism, expressing themselves through infected butter, are maiming and killing thousands of children," says Mr. Alfred W. McCann in a recent "Globe" (N. Y.). I had always thought of butter as an innocent dairy product till Mr. McCann looked at it; he looks at it and it becomes an object of pity, when he does not choose to make it astonish us, or grin at us, or stand on its head. I have seen butter become tragic in his hands. Mr. McCann is a stylist. I do not mean this with a smile, I mean it; he has admirable, untrammelled ways, there is a hound-like gallop about his words, a sinister, delightful enthusiasm always on the trail which is, I repeat, admirable, when one considers the prosaic nature of his game. To him a barrelful of dead fish is not at all that, it is a barrelful of mysterious possibilities, and in his hands the fish-dealer becomes only a trifle less inspired. I see him look at fish, smell of them, and clatter away to another fish-dealer's, pursued by the devil maybe—certainly racing with somebody, perhaps with himself. His style is a gallop, but it is other things not so easy to label; if ever it was imprisoned anywhere it is out for blood and fun, saltatory and ungaugeable as a mad grasshopper, but far from light and far from grasshoppery; it abounds in sudden gusts, in all manner of grimaces and off-hand shots, yet it never worries the question before you, or plays with it. I quote Mr. McCann again—from the same "Globe"—at pretty near his lowest ebb, that I may not be thought to have exaggerated.

"Yes, Mr. Farrell, July 28, 1915, was an eventful day in the history of indecent dairy products."

"The names of dirty factories were mentioned by the commissioner with such freedom of speech that it provoked a panic."

"The opponents of the bill to license the factories where creamery products are made, with their lawyers, were on their feet constantly interrupting. The chamber was full of sulphur and brimstone."

"The lawmakers, provoked by the violence of the situation, saw clearly that all was not well."

"You say that it is all well, Mr. Farrell. Why do you say that?"

"When one of the creamery men, after declaring that the sanitary conditions of the state of Wisconsin were the finest in the world as far as dairy products were concerned, was asked by one of the senators if he knew what *B. coli* signified, he shouted: 'There is no such thing.'"

"That answer disclosed to the Wisconsin senators that they were dealing with prejudice and passion, not with facts. Do you believe, Mr. Farrell, that germs or fairies are responsible for putrefaction and disease?"

"Let me remind you, Mr. Farrell, that it was following the tempestuous scene in which the existence of germs was denied that the legislature of the state of Wisconsin enacted a law providing for the licensing of cheese factories and creameries."

I seriously can recall no other newspaper man who can write with the same apparent unpremeditation and yet make one think.



Ridpath's Anthology says, "Keats, a celebrated poet"; "Carlyle, a celebrated Scottish essayist"; "Cervantes, a distinguished Spanish novelist"; "Chaucer, a celebrated English poet"; when Artemus Ward went to England, he said something similar—he said, "I come from the celebrated United States." The anthology speaks of "Mr. Whitman" and "Mr. Browning." It is called, "The Ridpath Library of Universal Literature," and is devoted to the world's best writers, "including the choicest extracts and masterpieces from their writings." That is what it says it is, but in the space devoted to Coleridge it says altogether different; of *Kubla Khan*, the noblest and most mysterious poem in the English language, just the right length for anthologies, not a word is printed, not a word of *Christabel*, only a few rhymes of "The Ancient Mariner"; the space is devoted to odes

"To Liberty," "To Chamounix," "Prayer for Britain," etc. In short, to his relatively mediocre work. This is incredible, but that is the way it is. More than eight pages are devoted to Andrew Carnegie, less than two to John Burroughs; if Oscar Wilde was excluded, as he is, presumably because of his style, I think Carnegie should have also been excluded because of his style. Giordano Bruno might have had as many as seven pages—he has two. Since Ridpath includes himself among the world's best writers, he might have given a page or two to his contemporary, Joseph Conrad. Hall Caine is in. I looked for William Jennings Bryan, but did not find him in, which duly surprised me. Of Walter Pater this is said, "But when we have praised Pater as a great stylist we must stop. This is an age of material civilization . . . it is doubtful if an Epicurean philosophy can make lasting headway even under the conditions that such an epoch produces, or if it is well for the mass of men who must fight the battle of life," etc. Of the two Mary Dodies nothing peculiar is said, but sixteen pages are devoted to them and only four to Dodgson (Lewis Carroll). Henri Fabre is out. Poe comes in for his measure: "There is a visual defect known as color-blindness in which the eye is incapable of distinguishing between the most dissimilar colors. Poe seems to have been Right-and-Wrong blind. It was not merely that he did wrong things, but he never seemed to have dreamed that there was any such thing as the Right or the Wrong. . . . Poe had lovable qualities. We are glad to believe that his conduct toward his young invalid wife and her mother, who was to him all that a mother could have been, was altogether irreproachable. Some worthy men liked him. More than one woman as highly gifted, as pure and noble as any in the land, more than liked him." Poor Poe! Ridpath did not like him. "Incredible as it may seem"—the spirit of this phrase recurs with a dismal iteration as one wanders through Ridpath's volumes. Incredible as it may seem—Ullalume is not included in the space devoted to Poe.



PREFACE

The following play was arrested on the house-tops for shouting. Through a hasty surgical operation I have extracted all the problems and placed them in footnotes at the bottom of the page, thus proving to myself for the first time that I can do with or without problems, as I choose.

K. C.

GETTING SUPPER

By Kernard Chaw

Characters:

Mr. John Cooper, 60, massive and genial. Vaguely ungrammatical.

Mrs. Helen Cooper, 50, prim and withered. Precise.

Ruth Cooper, 15.

Robert Cooper, 22, long-legged and dashing.

James Teller, 24. The late Pagan Puritanism.

A servant.

(Scene—A luxurious drawing-room. The Coopers are seated in divers bored postures, but are at bottom restless with a feeling of expectation.)

Mr. COOPER: Well, Bob, supposing we sit down to supper. I don't think your friend's coming.

ROBERT: Let us wait another ten minutes.

Mr. COOPER: We'll wait till seven-forty-five. I'm getting hungry for my supper.

RUTH: Father.

COOP: Yes, honey.

RUTH: I wish you wouldn't talk about having "supper."

COOP: But I'm getting hungry, honey.

RUTH: You know quite well what I mean. I have told you several times that supper is dinner in this city, and that real supper is only served at midnight.

COOP (*Absently*): Well, well. Feed clear up till midnight, do they? Now, who ever heard of such doings. So, let's see—supper is dinner. I won't forget it no more, honey.

RUTH: And I wish you wouldn't call me honey before people; it's *so* ridiculous. Anybody would think I was a mere child yet.

COOP (*Shouting, pleased*): Oho! Do you hear that, Mrs. Cooper?¹

RUTH (*Mimicking irritably*): Oho! I suppose you think I still play with dolls.

Mrs. COOPER: That's enough, child.

RUTH (*Mimicking*): That's enough, child! You, too, mother, you don't seem to realize that I've grown up, and that I ought not to be petted and patted in that silly manner.

Mrs. COOP: Ruth, I am surprised at you. We shall discuss this later.

RUTH: That won't do, mother, that tone of voice won't do one little mite of a bit. All I ask is that you cease pretending you can still send me up to bed without my supper. And my skirts, my skirts must be brought down lower the very next time we go to the tailor's. I have been thinking, too, and I see now how you pretend and how you always put me off with—with subterfuges. It's *too* ridiculous!²

COOP (*Explosively*): Ho! Ho! Ho!

Mrs. COOP: I *do* wish, John, you wouldn't shout when anything strikes your attention. It quite scares people, sometimes.

COOP: My dear, I don't know how to laugh any other way; some folks don't know how to laugh at all.

Mrs. COOP: Smile, John, smile. It is not unbecoming, on occasion.³

ROB: Oh, let dad do as he pleases!

Mrs. COOP: Ruth, I must talk this over with you, but not now, my child.

RUTH: I do think, though, mother,—

ROB: See here, Ruth, why don't you do as you're told? The discussion is ended. Smile, dad, smile. Laugh! Say ho ho! This is the city of lights and laughter askew! You have been here four weeks, but I have been here four years and this is what I know—I know that ho! ho! is all to the mustard. Gold! Gold! It is not to

¹The honey problem.

²The mother-and-daughter problem.

³The laughing problem.

be found under these roofs. So, I repeat . . . Hello, here's Teller at last. (*Exit.*)

COOP: What on earth was Bob talking about, Helen?

Mrs. COOP: I don't know.

RUTH (*Mysteriously*): I know.

COOP: Every once in a while he gets a raving fit. I wonder if this here city life⁴ . . . (*As maid passes*): Call that woman back and tell her to put supper on!

Mrs. COOP: In a minute, in a minute. (*Robert appears with Teller. Presentations.*)

COOP (*Genially*): Well, Mr. Teller, what are they doing in the world nowadays?

TELLER: All manner of things. Everything, so to speak, sir. War, and so forth.⁵

COOP: That's good. My family and me, we come from Dakota. I'm in the lumber and cat business out there.⁶ Plain folks, plain folks. Well, now we are all friends. Where's that woman gone to? Ring for her, Helen, and tell her to put—

Mrs. COOP: In a minute, *please*.

TELL: Mrs. Cooper, I'm late. You must allow me to explain—

COOP: Don't explain, Mr. Teller, don't explain, explanations are always fantastic. . . . (*The maid re-appears*) Ah, there she is. What's that French word you taught me, Bob?

ROB: Manger.

COOP (*Explosively, to maid*): Manjay!!

MAID: Mais, oui, Monsieur.⁷

COOP: What'd she say?

ROB: Peace, dad! She says you may feed now.

COOP: Come along, Mr. Teller, my friend. Let's get to it.

TELL (*Over-wrought*): Stop!! Do you know what we are going to do?

COOP (*Suddenly stopping*): No, what's the trouble?

TELL: We are going to do it, for the third time today! We are going to sanction what we call a privilege, what men have been

⁴The civic problem.

⁵The military problem.

⁶The cat problem.

⁷The French problem.

doing since the dawn of man! We are going to dilute our souls, to suppress our conscience, to plant the Devil's seed. For the third time today! Our wobbling morality is on its last legs, poisoned by convention. And we—we are robbers, we are cut-throats and pirates, slave-dealers! I belong—

COOP (*Earnestly*): Surely you don't belong to the Anti-food League? Now let me assure you, Mr. Teller, they're not to be taken seriously—

TELL: I belong to myself, but I am horribly assailed by doubt and suspicion. For the last five days I have not left my room. Locked in! I have been writing a tract: "What You Have Been Doing, By One Who's Done It." What we have been doing; ah, don't you see? There's the tumor, Bob. The domestic board, Mrs. Cooper! It is a hoary, a brutal tradition and it will slay us, Mr. Cooper, for our only virtuous acts are those we never attempt.

COOP (*Eupeptically*): But surely, surely, you will not refuse a sociable bite with us?

TELL (*Distressed*): A bite? Must we bite to be sociable? Then by heaven, no! I refuse to overload my conscience. Mrs. Cooper, have you any meat in the house?

Mrs. COOP: Why, yes, for tonight we have fish, pork-chops—

TELL (*Gloomily*): Pork-chops. (*To Mr. Cooper*) Do you know what a pork-chop means?

COOP: Let's see . . . No . . . No, I confess I don't know exactly what it means.

RUTH (*Mysteriously*): I know.

TELL (*To Ruth*): As the weakest of us all, you are the strongest. Tell him, Miss Cooper.

RUTH: It means a stuck pig, father.

COOP (*Energetically*): Nonsense! Nonsense! It also means a pork-chop! Besides, all this is silly talk; if we don't eat, we die. That's plain, that's sensible; that settles it.

TELL (*Vehemently*): That has nothing to do with the question! Whether we eat or whether we don't, we die just the same.

COOP (*Shouting*): Granted we do! Granted we do for the sake of the argument! Is a hog then immortal? Are we to balk at

sticking him? Is there any authority that says *thou shalt not*? Is there any authority that says—

Mrs. COOPER: Don't shout, John, don't shout, please.

COOP (*Explosively*): Can't a man shout in his own dwelling-house?

ROB (*Reflectively*): That's true, Teller, old man. A hog, dash it all, he's not got a soul, don't you know?

TELL: How do you know?

ROB: How do I know? Well, how do I know a good many other things? How do I know *I've* got one, for example?

TELL: Well, how do you?

COOP: How does he? We have the authority of a hundred thousand ministers of the gospel for it, the authority of the Bible, of Christianity, of Father McCrosky—

TELL (*Hotly*): Yes, yes! The fogs, the fiends and the fathers of the church. The eternal triolet! I passed it in my youth, sir.

COOP (*Sternly*): It is easy, horribly easy, to think so, Mr. Teller. But have a care, the cannibals and heathens have not yet come to the church.

TELL: Aha! The cannibals! You have dared to name them as an example. Why, they are the only altruistic people in God's world, they are too altruistic to hurt a fly, a calf, a sheep, they have the brotherhood and bigness of heart to feed preferably upon themselves. The cannibals! Why they are the only advanced people I can name. They said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," but unlike ourselves, they put it in practice. They saw the vanity of all things, consequently they discarded all things, they discarded cities, temples and edifices, dress, ribbons and cocktails, dust-roads and iron-roads, kings and the worry about kings, machines, books and the rest of the claptrap, including words, which we no longer know what to do with; we use myriads of words, they use only monosyllables, and few of them. And when they had discarded these things their eyes became sane. They see. We preach the simple life, they practise it. No, Bob, no, Mr. Cooper, let us rather pray to be like them. And let us leave the church aside. What I am telling you is true; we are thieves and cut-throats—

COOP: I protest, I energetically protest!

TELL: I say we are thieves and cut-throats! We rob bees of their honey, we rob cows of their milk, fowl of their eggs, we twist off innocent necks and burst in the innocent foreheads of cattle, we are butchers, execrable term! We plunder and lay waste! We asphyxiate a hundred million crustaceans and the other millions we swallow alive, we poison geese and feed on their diseased livers—gloat on them! And veal, what about veal? We cut a calf's throat and strap him up, hind legs uppermost, till he bleeds to death. In all this is there not one tear of pity? Even the walrus wept, and the crocodile, but we—

COOP: I protest! If you feel that way about it, then eat grass. Please yourself! Purge yourself! Eat vegetables, eat potatoes, beans, cauliflowers, artichokes—

TELL (*Horried*): Stop! Do you know what an artichoke means?

COOP (*Testily*): No sir! I am happy to say I don't.

RUTH (*Mysteriously*): I know.

TELL: Tell him, Miss Cooper.

RUTH (*In a mild trance*): It is as strong as a rose, father, and the spirit of religion is in it, in the set and cut of the leaves—they are ascetic. You will understand what I see, father, when I tell you that it could never swear at a monastery, no, nor at a hooded monk—

ROB (*Impatiently*): Now see here Ruth, can you name any vegetable that will swear at a monk?

RUTH: The cauliflower. There is a fine, delicately white rhetoric about the face of a cauliflower that will swear at a monk in his habit, for it is festive, Robert. About wild bean-vines there is poetry, but we have plotted and enslaved them, one weary row upon another like soldiers.

Mrs. COOP: I should like to know, Mr. Teller, what your intentions are. Supper is getting cold, very cold, I should think.

TELL (*Tragically*): Beware! Beware! The house-force speaks in you, Mrs. Cooper. Beware of how you tempt a sorely-tempted man. (*Lamely*) Yet it is true. I want, I passionately long for a chop, and yet—

ROB: Well come along, old man. Be sociable. All these ideas and so forth, they're only talk, you know.

COOP (*Augustly*): Mr. Teller, there are only two problems in life, but there are twenty-seven tragedies: the first is, to trample on what you know; the second, to trample on what you don't know; the third, not to know you trample; the fourth, to know you don't trample; the fifth, to trample on you know not what; the sixth—

Mrs. COOPER: *Are you coming?* (*Curtain*)

Enrique Cross.



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